

## Imagining a Richer Tapestry

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**T**he historic preservation/cultural resources field in America is unique in the world for many reasons. One of its most distinctive facets is the prominent role that cultural diversity plays in many aspects of heritage preservation work. This is because of the way in which the United States was, and continues to be, settled and developed—creating a rich tapestry of buildings, settlements, and art forms. Nearly everywhere, one can see and interpret the imprint of America's ethnic and cultural groups on the landscape.

The National Park Service is proud of the role that its national parks and national historic preservation programs plays in preserving and interpreting ethnic history. We list traditional cultural properties associated with American Indians in the National Register of Historic Places. We administer the federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives that produce housing in rehabilitated historic buildings in many ethnic neighborhoods. We document ethnic-related historic properties through the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, the National Historic Landmarks Survey Program, and the Archeology and Ethnography program. We develop lesson plans and travel itineraries to teach young people and adults about important events, places, and themes associated with the nation's cultural groups.

While we can be pleased with the tremendous advances that the national historic preservation program has made in this area, there are still additional challenges before us. We hope to enlist your support and involvement in them. Without your interest, the field will not capture the imagination of the American people, and consequently, we will not be as successful in preserving the nation's cultural heritage as we have been in the past.

The Underground Railroad Preservation and Education Initiative is now underway, thanks to seed funds from the U.S. Congress. Through this Initiative, the National Park Service is coor-

dinating preservation and education efforts nationwide and integrating local historic places associated with the Underground Railroad into a mosaic of community, regional, and national stories. We offer technical assistance on documenting Underground Railroad sites, will provide distinctive plaques to identify properties related to this historical theme, and have developed a web site and travel itinerary on the topic.

The demographics of the historic preservation/cultural resources profession is another challenge. The professions that work in this area—historians, archeologists, architects, curators, and others—are woefully lacking in minorities who can greatly enrich decision-making about our cultural heritage. Without a greater participation of diverse professionals, our field will become marginalized because the increasingly diverse population will view it as unrelated to their cultural heritage needs. To meet this challenge, the National Park Service's Cultural Resources Diversity Initiative was established in late 1998. The Diversity Initiative is described elsewhere in this publication.

The last challenge I wish to address here is the need to uncover and interpret the many untold stories associated with historic places, including units of the national park system. When we interpret a Civil War battlefield site, we should do more than talk about military strategy. We ought to address the institution of slavery as the root cause of this war. When we look at a plantation house, we need to cover more than the role of the state's "leading families" and the life they led. We need to include the role of African American slaves and servants who built and maintained the property. When we look at an immigration station on the West Coast, we should talk about more than monumental government architecture. We need to talk about the Asian immigrants who came to America to seek a better life. We know that there are many more examples of these interpretation needs. We are taking steps to update and upgrade the stories associated with units of the national park system.

The sum total of our efforts in cultural diversity is a richer understanding of our national heritage. We will reach a much larger audience with cultural heritage needs. We will preserve places that are important to the nation's cultural groups in ways that are in keeping with their cultural values. With this broader framework, we

will be able to weave a richer national tapestry that strengthens all of us as a nation.

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## Enlivening the Study of History Teaching With Historic Places

The National Register's Teaching with Historic Places program promotes places as effective tools for enlivening the study of history, social studies, geography, and other topics taught in schools. The program has produced a series of classroom-ready lesson plans, each of which contains a variety of documents about historic places and engages students in the work historians do to decipher the past. Many Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans—including those honoring the contributions of African Americans, women, and Hispanic Americans—are available on the National Register web site at [www.cr.nps.gov/nr](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr).

In *Chicago's Black Metropolis: Understanding History Through a Historic Place*, students trace the history of a prosperous "city within a city" from its establishment in the mid-19th century by African Americans fleeing oppression in the South through the 1920s. After examining evidence of the national impact the area gained as a model of black achievement, students construct a process for investing places with historical meaning and look for places in their own community that deserve recognition.

*Adeline Hornbek and the Homestead Act* provides "a Colorado Success Story" of a single mother who defied stereotypical gender roles to create a successful ranch under the 1862 Homestead Act. The lesson plan includes maps and photographs of the ranch and surrounding area, a copy of Hornbek's

original Testimony of Claimant form, and activities that ask students to research the impact of the Homestead Act on various states and the lives of influential women in their home communities.

Students explore *Ybor City: Cigar Capital of the World* to discover why and



*This photo of señoritas on a balcony, Ybor City, 1928, illustrates the cover of Teaching with Historic Places lesson plan, Ybor City: Cigar Capitol of the World. Photo courtesy Burgert Brothers Collection.*

when Cubans brought their cigar businesses to Florida; how immigrants retained their cultural identity in their new country; and how the economic, ethnic, and social development of their own communities compares with that of Tampa's.

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